



Skills
Development
Scotland

Climate Change Strategy Progress Report 2022-24

April 2025

If you require this report in alternative formats please contact equality@sds.co.uk

Foreword

The last ten years have been the warmest on record.

Furthermore, 2024 became the first year with an average temperature exceeding 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level, the threshold set by the Paris Agreement to significantly reduce the impacts of climate change.

Scotland has set bold ambitions to become a net-zero carbon emitter by 2045, with this target requiring fundamental changes to many parts of our infrastructure such as energy generation, transport and the heating of buildings.

With the commitment to tackling the climate crisis more important than ever, SDS remains steadfast to the ambition set out in our Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030. Here we outlined our aim to be:

“A lead contributor to a low carbon, inclusive and sustainable economy in Scotland, and on track to becoming a net-zero organisation.”

With a 56% reduction in our carbon footprint since the launch of our Strategy, I’m proud that we are still on track to meet our 2030 target.

As the national skills agency, we will continue to help ensure that individuals and employers are supported to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the transition to a green economy.

During Strategy period 2022-24 we have continued to adopt and actively search for new, innovative ways of working that will reduce our environmental impact whilst allowing us to continue to provide first-class products and services for the people and businesses of Scotland.

This report sets out examples of the measures we have taken to achieve considerable progress in supporting Scotland to achieve its green ambitions over the last two years.





I’m proud that this has included delivering the second of two pathfinder projects as part of the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan and developing the ScotWind Skills infographic and brochure to raise awareness of jobs relating to offshore wind.

Moving into the next phase of our Strategy, we are as committed as ever to taking transformative action to achieve our ambitions. Partnership working across the skills eco-system will be key, as will continued collaboration with our colleagues, who continue to demonstrate their passion for, and a commitment to, taking action on climate change every day.

Neville Prentice
Senior Director of Delivery

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1. Introduction

About Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency. Our ambition is that skills contribute to a thriving, productive and inclusive Scotland.

Collaborating extensively, we work to deliver our vision for an agile, dynamic and employer-led skills and careers ecosystem, which enables all people to develop the skills, adaptive resilience, and personal agency to thrive in a vibrant and inclusive labour market.

Through intelligence-led delivery of Scotland's Career Service, apprenticeships and other learning and skills interventions, and the sharing of expertise and insight, we inspire and enable people and businesses to develop the right skills for a changing world. In doing so, we aim to generate the change that will lead to inclusive growth, greater productivity, a more prosperous and skilled workforce, and a fairer, more equal society.

Further details on SDS's strategic approach and operational activities can be found in our [Strategic Plan 2022-27](#).

About this report

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 mandates that public sector bodies, including SDS, must contribute to emissions reduction targets, support adaptation programmes and exercise their functions in a sustainable manner.

In our Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030, we set out our aim by 2030 to be:

“a lead contributor to a low carbon, inclusive and sustainable economy in Scotland, and on track to becoming a net-zero organisation.”

Our Strategy identified four workstreams across which we aim to deliver our environmental ambitions:

- **Supporting a green economy**
- **Digital capability**
- **Business processes**
- **Organisational culture**

An infographic showing our headline figures is shown on pages 5-6 and an update on progress we have made in each workstream since 2023 is provided on the subsequent pages.

Key results

Our target is to reduce our carbon footprint by 67% by 2030 against our 2019/20 baseline.

At the end of 2024/25, in comparison to the 2019/20 baseline, we have achieved a:



Colleagues' perception of our commitment to tackling climate change is monitored through a series of questions in our all colleague Your Views survey. The 2024 survey showed:

- When asked, 'SDS is committed to addressing climate change across our internal operations' Your Views produced a mean score of 6.7 out of 10.
- The question 'SDS is committed to addressing climate change in how we deliver our services externally' received a mean score of 6.6 out of 10.

¹ This is based on travel expense claims made up to 10 April for each year.

Key results continued

Table 1: Carbon footprint (tCO2e) of commute travel and hybrid working

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Commute travel	2,107	189	726	1,224	928	790
Home working energy	39	288	235	124	99	86

Table 2: Marketing print volume figures 2019-2024

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	924,182	430,785	311,075	201,105	237,309	167,055

Table 3: Office print volume figures for 2019-2024

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Black & white	2,410,850	577,731	159,999	427,435	630,041	402,950
Colour	1,874,755	380,869	105,153	339,122	411,545	253,602

Workstream One: Supporting a Green Economy



SDS's commitment: Across our work, we will support Scotland's ambitions for a green economy.

As part of the Supporting a Green Economy workstream we aim to:

- **Influence the skills system to be responsive to the climate emergency**
- **Help embed sustainability into learning provision.**

Achieving net-zero emissions by 2045 requires a rapid upskilling of Scotland's workforce across all sectors and occupations. SDS has a critical role to play in aligning the skills system with Scotland's green economic ambitions.

Since our last report, SDS activities in this workstream have included:

- **Delivering two Pathfinder projects relating to the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP).** You can read more about this on page 8.
- **Working with stakeholders across sectors and regions to support a green economy.** Example actions include:
 - Supporting Scottish Enterprise to identify the skills required to meet employer demand for Clean Growth skills, outlined in the Tay Cities Clean Growth Skills Report.
 - Contributing to the Skills and Fair Work element of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport business case. One of the aims of the Scottish and UK Governments' green freeport model is to create green jobs.

- **Establishing a baseline of sustainable delivery practices among learning providers and highlighting best practice.** In 2024, SDS published the [MA provider sustainability review](#). The report made recommendations around exploring CPD options for learning providers and raising awareness of sustainable practices.
- **Providing career information relating to green jobs.** Example actions include:
 - Updating green jobs information on our career information and advice web service [My World of Work](#). Information is given on what types of green jobs there are, along with learning opportunities.
 - Developing a [ScotWind](#) Skills infographic and brochure to raise awareness of the range of jobs relating to offshore wind. You can read more about this on page 9.
- **Launching a new immersive career education game, Skillscraft.** Developed with Minecraft Education, the game allows primary and secondary pupils to explore Scottish landmarks and learn through playing. The activities contain information about emerging areas of the Scottish economy including space, technology, renewable energy and sustainable construction, and will enhance the participants' career skills and knowledge about the world of work.
- **Maintaining the Labour Market Information Green Hub** with information on green training, net-zero and the circular economy.

Case study

CESAP Pathfinder Work Package 2

The Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025 (CESAP) highlighted that investment into current and future skills in support of net-zero must be based on a strong evidence base.

SDS led work on two Pathfinder projects, supported by regional partners and colleagues from the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government.

Work Package 2 was a pilot into the decarbonisation of domestic and commercial heating. Heat decarbonisation is the transition from fossil fuel heating to low carbon heat sources, including the delivery of clean heat and energy efficiency measures.

It was chosen as it is one of the early investment programmes being delivered as part of the Scottish Government Climate Change Plan. Glasgow City Region and the Shetland Islands were identified as areas to work with partners to co-design pilot approaches.

This study, which was commissioned by SDS, used a combination of desk research and 29 stakeholder consultations across 17 organisations to understand the nature and value of heat decarbonisation investments.

Elaine Ellis, Development Manager at SDS said: “We will not reach net-zero without changing how we heat our homes. The construction industry will be central to these changes and understanding the skills challenges and opportunities to address is essential if we are to build the workforce, we need as Scotland decides how to address this key challenge. Pathfinder 2 project adds to our knowledge base and demonstrates some of the positive steps that can be taken.”

You can read the report [here](#).



Case study

ScotWind

Offshore wind is critical for Scotland, the UK and most of our European neighbours to transition from fossil fuel powered electricity production towards clean, renewable power.

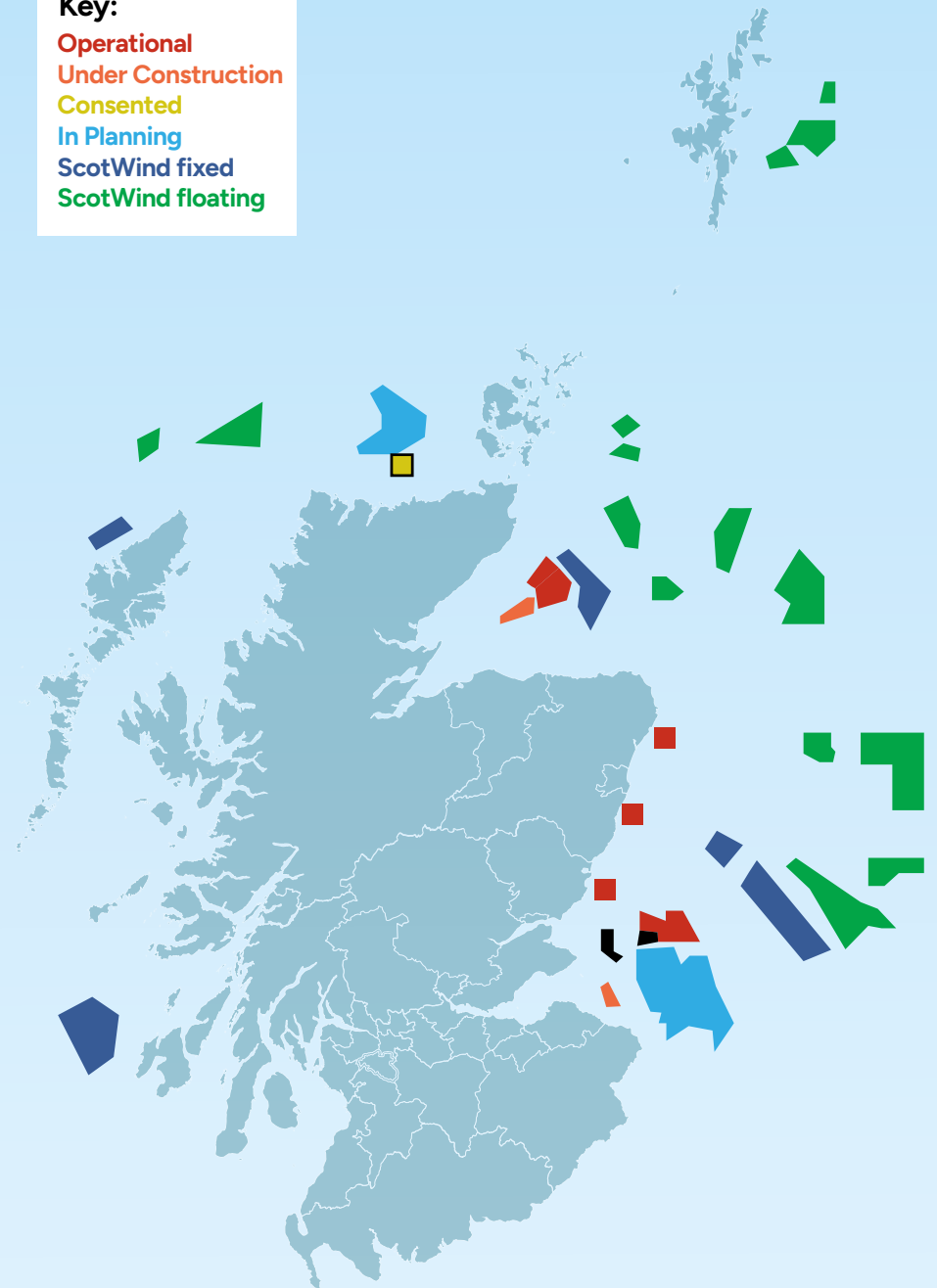
In partnership with the Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council, SDS published a [brochure on career opportunities across Scotland in offshore wind](#), alongside the ScotWind Jobs Quick Guide. The resources are a useful and easy-to-use way of raising awareness of the range of jobs relating to offshore wind as well as offering signposting to relevant education and training provision.

Rob Orr, Sector Manager for Energy, said: "Using and sharing this resource with our stakeholders will support the collective push to increase understanding across Scotland of the many opportunities offshore wind offers, and encourage young Scots to understand and make the most of the job opportunities in their region."

"Both the infographic and brochure resources will be useful to inward investors and supply chain companies as it shows the action being taken on a Scotland-wide basis to advance offshore wind and secure the future workforce."

Karen Moir, Evidence and Impact Manager, said: "The team have worked hard to ensure this publication is a useful and usable resource. We've had such great feedback from industry and colleagues on the quick jobs guide, so it's great to be able to get the full brochure out in the world."

Key:
Operational
Under Construction
Consented
In Planning
ScotWind fixed
ScotWind floating



Workstream Two: Digital Capability



SDS's commitment: We will continue to enhance our digital capability, in line with technological advancements, to support our wider sustainability ambitions.

As part of the Digital capability workstream we aim to:

- **Enable colleagues to understand and have the confidence to deliver digitally**
- **Enhance our service offer, making best use of digital technology.**

Improving our digital capability and use of technology allows us to deliver our services with improved efficiencies and enhanced capacity. Digital technology allows us to work in a flexible way that reduces the need to travel and improves access to both our services and jobs in rural and remote communities.

We remain committed to a blended approach to service delivery with customer choice and flexibility at its heart. This acknowledges that in-person support will always be best for some of our customers, including those who face barriers to engagement such as a lack of digital skills, digital poverty, disability, or comprehension or language support needs.

Since our last report, SDS activities in this workstream have included:

- **Moving to conducting our quality assurance reviews of apprenticeships online rather than in person.** You can read more about this on page 11.
- **Continuing investment in digital technology to facilitate remote working and supporting our colleagues to use it.** We have continued to implement O365 updates which support hybrid working and share learning with colleagues through internal Digi? Aye! campaign updates and the digital champion network. Updates in 2023 and 2024 which support hybrid working include collaborative notes in online meetings and whiteboard updates.
- **Using an Energy Dashboard for "live" analysis.** This online dashboard, hosted on Mitie Energy's View platform, enables the analysis of data at specific points in time and allows for comparisons with previous periods for selected offices. Through undertaking weekly analysis of gas and electricity consumption, we can identify anomalies in total consumption levels and usage patterns, allowing for issues to be addressed as they arise.

Case study

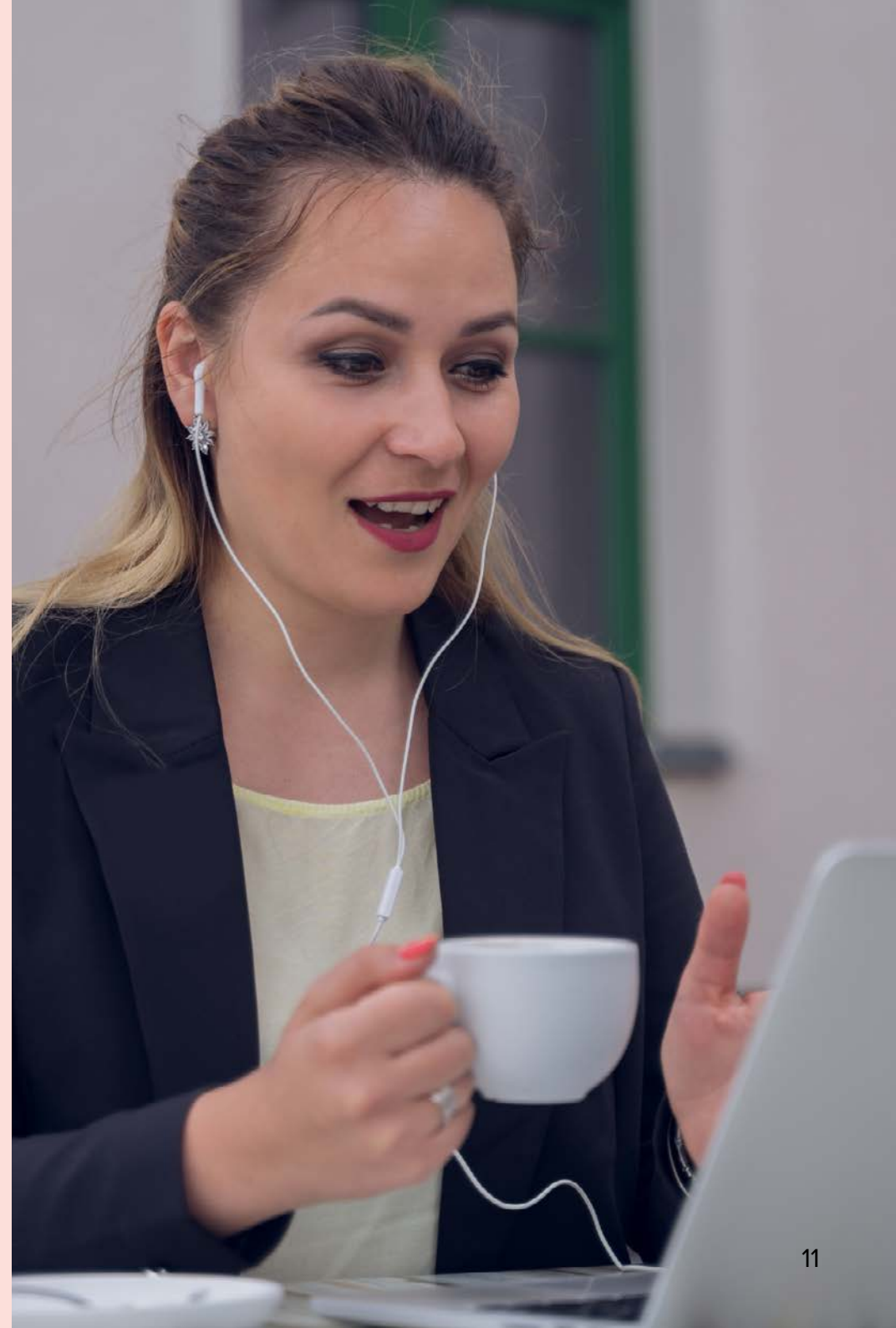
Move to digital Quality Assurance

SDS is responsible for conducting quality assurance reviews of work-based learning providers to ensure that all SDS funded learning is of high quality and benefits the learner.

Before 2021, these reviews were undertaken face-to-face, led by six Quality Assessors. In addition, Skills Investment Advisers from National Training Programmes supported the review activity so in any given year there could be approximately 45 colleagues travelling around the country.

From 2021/22 onwards, almost all quality assurance reviews have been completed digitally utilising MS-Teams functionality. In the last three years, a total of 48 visits have been undertaken this way. In 2023/24, 99% of the working days required to complete the reviews were undertaken digitally, surpassing the target of 90%. Through adapting their way of working and using digital technology, the Quality Assurance Team were able to reduce their emissions from business travel while still ensuring high quality delivery of service.

Michael McHugh, Quality Delivery Manager, Work Based Learning, said: "Utilising digital technology for this quality assurance activity has enabled us to engage with a broader range of learning provider staff. Additionally, it has offered greater flexibility in scheduling our review days, rather than being limited to a specific three or four days on-site. This approach has enhanced staff productivity by reducing travel time and significantly decreased the carbon footprint associated with this activity."



Workstream Three: Business Processes



SDS's commitment: We will continuously improve our business processes so that they better support our environmental ambitions.

As part of the Business processes workstream we aim to:

- **Embed sustainability into our business processes**
- **Drive environmental performance reporting**
- **Improve efficient use of resources.**

To deliver our green commitments as an organisation we are embedding environmental considerations into our business plans, policies, and procedures. We are exploring more sustainable ways to carry out our 'business as usual' activities that will allow us to meet our carbon reduction targets.

Since our last report, SDS activities in this workstream have included:

- **Moving services closer to the community.** Although not driven by carbon emissions reduction, moving to a model of co-location and community delivery closer to our customers was recognised as crucial for achieving our carbon footprint reduction targets in the Climate Change Strategy. You can read more about this on page 13.
- **Completing internal audit of net-zero and climate change activity.** In 2023 an internal audit was undertaken to consider SDS's strategic and operational efforts to contribute to Scottish Government's emissions reduction targets. The review confirmed that "the arrangements to support compliance

with relevant legislation and the mainstreaming of net-zero and climate change are well-established and are operating effectively across the organisation".

- **Appointing a Senior Sponsor for climate change activity.** In 2024, the Director for Skills Planning and Sector Development volunteered to be the Senior Sponsor for internal climate change activity. The primary purpose of this role is to provide a vital link between those implementing actions and reviewing and signing off climate change related reports and the senior leadership. The sponsor has also provided leadership during campaigns such as taking part in a presentation during Scotland's Climate Week 2024 and joining a Green Champion Network quarterly call for a questions and answers session.
- **Undertaking peer validation of our annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report.** It is recommended that the annual mandatory reports are validated by an external body. We worked with colleagues in Scottish Enterprise (SE) to undertake a peer review of each other's 2022/23 and 2023/24 reports and plan to continue this going forwards. Through the feedback we received from SE, we made improvements to our reports including providing more detail around the impact of moving to community locations and the net-zero internal audit.
- **Reducing waste by working with the Turing Trust to recycle old laptops,** meaning they could be distributed to schools around the world. You can read more about this on page 14.

Case study

Moving services closer to the community

Moving our services closer to the community has been crucial for reducing our carbon emissions.

Through listening to the customer voice, the Career Review identified the need for more community-based services. The aim of the project has been to maximise accessibility for our customers, while also delivering the best value for public investment.

By reducing the number of SDS operated sites and prioritising co-location and community delivery, we minimise resource consumption, waste production, and the overall environmental impact of our estate.

We are on track to achieve our carbon footprint reduction targets in the Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030. At the end of 2024/2025, our energy use in kWh has decreased by 39% compared to 2019/2020, largely due to moving several SDS operated sites to a model of co-location and community delivery closer to our customers.

Derek Cairns, Property and Facilities Manager at SDS, said: "This commitment to sustainability not only supports our Climate Change Strategy targets but also ensures that our facilities are future-proofed, resilient, and environmentally responsible for the long term."



Case study

Laptop Refresh

Enterprise IS (EIS) is a cross-agency IT service, housed within SDS but also providing services to Scotland's enterprise and skills agencies, Scottish Enterprise, Highland & Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise. Across the EIS partnership, there are approximately 3,800 laptops between four and seven years old, and the general recycle policy is that devices come to the end of warranty at around five years and should be replaced.

EIS partner organisations asked how end-of-life laptops could be put to better use rather than disposed of. The project team agreed that social responsibility and carbon footprint reduction was a key objective, which culminated in a partnership with the Turing Trust, a charity who upskills volunteers in IT and business skills. Over the 18-month partnership with the Turing Trust, approximately 10,000 students have learned vital IT skills using the laptops. Beyond this, the environmental impact will offset 158 tonnes of CO2 emissions, the equivalent of planting 400 trees, or offsetting the annual carbon footprints of 16 Scots. The embodied energy savings created are also enough to power 39 UK homes for a year.

Suzanne McInnes, IT Director, said: "The majority of charities couldn't take the volumes of equipment we have but our team were determined and eventually came across the Turing Trust and the work they do both here and in Africa. The Turing Trust met our security, social and green requirements and a partnership was established. Our equipment is now being reconditioned and recycled for use in charities, schools, colleges here and abroad whilst reducing our carbon footprint. The sheer tenacity of the team, willingness to challenge the status quo and thinking about the bigger picture including social responsibility and environmental concerns drove the team and project to success."



Workstream Four: Organisational Culture



SDS's commitment: We will help our people to consider their existing work practices and embrace more sustainable ways of working.

As part of the Organisational Culture workstream we aim to:

- **Drive sustainable colleague behaviours and use of our resources**
- **Adopt exemplar green practices, leading change in others.**

Meeting the net-zero target is dependent on a culture shift in workplaces across Scotland. As a public sector organisation, SDS aims to demonstrate strong leadership in our commitment to environmental sustainability.

Since our last report, SDS activities in this workstream have included:

- **Updating mandatory Climate Change eLearning.** In 2020, SDS introduced an internally developed eLearning module on Climate Change. This provided colleagues with a basic understanding of climate change science and the strategic context we are operating in, such as Government policy and targets. It also gave an update of our progress to date in reducing our carbon footprint and outlined actionable steps colleagues could take to support further progress. The 2024 update included refreshed videos, statistics and progress on strategy actions to keep all colleagues informed about the current state of climate change and progress within the organisation.

- **Leading a joint webinar other with public sector agencies on Scotland's journey to net-zero during Climate Week 2024.** For Scotland's Climate Week 2024, SDS led on and organised a webinar with five other public sector organisations to share best practice. You can read more about this on page 16.
- **Producing an internal environmental news bulletin.** 'The Green Room' was launched in 2024 and is led by a group of Green Champions from different departments across the organisation. It includes details of upcoming events and campaigns, everyday tips and advice to live more sustainably, good news stories from Scotland and around the world and detail on what SDS is doing.
- **Increasing the value available through the Cycle2Work Scheme.** The limit of this salary sacrifice scheme has been increased from £1000 to £3000, giving a greater selection of bikes to choose from, including e-bikes. By making it more financially accessible, the aim is to boost active travel for both commuting and business travel. You can read more about this on page 17.
- **Considering the environmental impact of our event management processes** A review of our Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for event management resulted in new wording, which requires colleagues to ensure that the venue is easily accessible by public transport and avoid potential wastage generation from over-ordering marketing materials.

Case study

Supporting Scotland's journey to net-zero

Scottish Government's Climate Week 2024 highlighted the importance and urgency of tackling climate change and celebrated all the positive climate action being taken across the country to help inspire further collective, transformative change.

The theme of the week was "Stories for Change" which aimed to encourage individuals, communities, and organisations to share their personal experiences and actions of what they're doing to adapt to and combat climate change.

SDS led on setting up a webinar during the week to find out about recent net-zero developments across the public sector. The webinar encouraged a united approach among public sector agencies in tackling the climate emergency.

During the call, SDS discussed the 'Skillscraft: a Minecraft Education Project'. Developed within Minecraft Education, Skillscraft takes primary and secondary pupils on a journey through famous Scottish landmarks, playing games and exploring careers in the Renewable Energy, Sustainable Construction and Space Technology sectors. Skillscraft aligns to the curriculum, bringing careers into the classroom that are relevant now, and in the future.

We also heard from The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) on how to adapt to Scotland's changing climate; Scottish Forestry on the use of satellites in surveying for tree disease; Scottish Funding Council on alliances for research challenges; and Visit Scotland on net-zero in the tourism industry.

The webinar was open to all SDS colleagues, and colleagues of the agencies holding the call, as well as our customers, partners and stakeholders.



Case study

E-bike trial

West Lothian Bike Library and South East Scotland Transport Partnership offered a free e-bike trial for employees from public sector organisations to borrow an e-bike to explore how it might fit into their daily routine or commute.

SDS Careers Adviser Ailsa Morgan recently took part in the trial and urged others to consider an e-bike. Ailsa explained: "Being able to trial the e-bikes for an extended period made a massive difference as it allowed a fuller insight into when and how I'd use it to commute.

"The fact that I could switch into 'Turbo' mode whenever I encountered a hill meant that I whizzed into work with minimal effort but with all the rewards. I got to see wildlife and the seasons changing in a way that I definitely would have missed if travelling in my car on the city bypass. On the way home I felt all the stresses and strains of the day melt away."

At the beginning of 2025, Ailsa's experience was promoted in an internal blog. It aimed to encourage colleagues to look for their local bike library or sign up for the Cycle2Work scheme at a time of year when people might be looking for something new to try.

Ailsa is now researching the best e-bike to purchase: "Come Spring/ Summer I plan to hop on my new bike and replace a couple of car journeys a week with some pedal power - great for the body and mind, but also for the planet."

Colleagues can purchase a brand-new bike and/or accessories through the Cycle2Work scheme, offering tax and national insurance savings via a 12-month salary sacrifice agreement. The limit has been increased from £1,000 to £3,000 giving colleagues a greater selection of bikes to choose from.



Looking ahead

Significant uncertainty on the future function and remit of SDS has been created by the Scottish Government's post-school education and skills reform. Scottish Government announced its decision to consolidate all post-school funding provision within the Scottish Funding Council.

SDS is expected to continue to deliver its responsibilities for National Training Programmes until mid to late 2026. Further decisions made by the Scottish Government will impact SDS and the products and services we deliver.

This could impact how we deliver our Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030 going forward. In the meantime, we will continue to progress the ambitions and workstreams outlined in that Strategy. SDS remains committed to becoming a lead contributor to a low carbon, inclusive and sustainable economy in Scotland by 2030, and to be on track to becoming a net-zero organisation.

A range of internal monitoring and reporting mechanisms exist, including our Strategy Monitoring Group, to track actions and progress towards this ambition.

As committed to previously, we will publish an update against our Strategy every two years, with the next report due in 2027. Key performance relating to reducing our carbon footprint will also continue to be published annually in the SDS Annual Review.



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